



Realizing Our Common Goodness

One Sacred Encounter at a Time

By RAYMOND WEISS, MA, NHA

Co-sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Yankton, South Dakota, and the Presentation Sisters of Aberdeen, South Dakota, Avera Health was established in 2000 when the two congregations joined as one health ministry to serve the greater South Dakota area and four surrounding states.

Grounded in the assurance that God permeates all moments of human experience, Avera is deeply committed to continuing the healing ministry of Jesus, where no moment is too small to positively impact the lives and health of persons and the communities it serves. As a healing ministry of the church, Avera is compelled to follow the example of Jesus and carry out the work of healing — not only by providing care for the physically ill, but also by working to restore health and wholeness in all facets of the human person and the human community.¹

In this way, Avera strives to achieve the common good, as it is expressed in St. John XXIII's papal encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*. In his words, "The common good, since it is intimately bound up with human nature, cannot therefore exist fully and completely unless the human person is taken into account at all times. Thus, attention must be paid to the basic nature of the common good and what it is that brings it about. ... The common good is something which affects the needs of the whole man, body and soul."²

This quote reflects the essence of the Catholic health ministry. One moment at a time, in one sacred encounter at a time, Avera and all Catholic health ministries are compelled to this realization of the common good. Entrusted with the care of

our communities, the Avera Health ministry supports life from conception through death, believing that the journey of life, including the beginning and the end, are gifts of the Creator. With special attention for the poor, frail and at-risk persons in our society, the care provided is discernible by our Catholic identity bringing life to its mission through the daily living of Avera's core values of compassion, hospitality and stewardship.³

In addition to advancing the common good through its commitment to technology, genomic research and missionary work and by providing safe, reliable and holistic care, the Avera Health ministry aims for the realization of the common good with workplace spirituality practices. Although the practices are simple in nature, their framework is an intentional workplace spirituality, fostering a daily life-giving workplace environment for employees and transformative healing for the patients and families Avera serves.

The concept of workplace spirituality has been a cornerstone of Catholic health ministry since its origin. However, its impact within a ministry's workplace culture depends upon its inclusivity and intentionality. An effective spirituality-centered workplace environment consistently invites the inner life and vocational giftedness of each employee to flourish. This kind of reflection-

rich environment promotes a relational and life-giving culture, inspiring a “companionate love”⁴ between colleagues, heart-to-heart connections between caregivers and patients, and compassionate service to others.

As a result, a spiritual healing energy is unleashed within the ministry, fostering an individual and collective discovery of the sacred. This spirituality of the workplace awakens an inner sense of awe and wonder — without judgment — and is authentically inclusive. It evokes a powerful sense of purpose and meaning in the day-to-day work activities and deepens the sense of mission within the ministry itself. This deepened sense of mission creates a life-giving workplace environment and allows practice and processes to emerge from spiritual depth.⁵

One of the many ways Avera fosters a life-giving workplace environment and brings life to its mission is through the Avera Daily Reflections. This spiritual workplace practice invites Avera’s employees and friends to offer a reflection on Scripture readings for each day of the week. Participant employees, physicians, administrators, women and men religious, direct and indirect caregivers and volunteers are encouraged to offer a reflection regarding a formative personal experience or story that is relevant to one or more of the daily readings. Sent out in a daily email, the reflections offer all employees an opportunity to mindfully pause and encounter the sacred in their everyday work. This practice is ministry at its best and is deeply rooted in the Benedictine tradition, which notices the extraordinary in the ordinary

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When I think in concrete terms about working for, or more appropriately, toward the common good — because I think that is an ongoing intentional activity — I try to ground it in the reality of my life, i.e., where I spend most of my time: in health care, and more specifically, in palliative care. We will begin to know how to achieve a society in which all people thrive and flourish, when we come to a common understanding of what that comprises, first of all, and then, having defined the agenda that it implies, we also come to a sense of the dynamic proactivity that is required. Using Palliative Care as an example, we need to work for practices, processes, policies and law that will lead to awareness of and access to the best care for seriously ill people, and conversely, we need to work against all of the practices, processes, policies and law that would obstruct, prevent or deny that access, or like the current efforts of the proponents for assisted suicide, would undermine the efforts to promote best care.

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and in which no moment is too small for nearness to God.

Through Avera's practice of daily reflections, the writer and readers participate in the common good. That is to say, according to the principle of the common good, the good of each human person is ultimately related to the good of the whole community. Reflection invites individual and organizational transformation. Instead of living in a *chronos* world, where the essence of time is chronological and in which time is managed by calendar and clock, a ministry journeys toward a *kairos* world, where time is profoundly recognized in the present moment. Individually, *kairos* invites the re-enchantment with everyday life experience, and all human life is recognized as gift. Our eyes are opened, persons are transfigured before us and we begin to see others as God sees — one beautiful moment at a time.

Another powerful way the Avera Health ministry works for the common good is by being intentional about care for the caregiver. Fully aware of the growing epidemic of physician burnout and secondary stresses that contribute to compassion fatigue, the Avera Health ministry has established a nationally recognized physician well-being program that continues to grow in scope and impact. Through its Live, Improve, Grow, Heal and Treat (LIGHT) program, under the direction of Mary Wolf, LPC, MH and Jill Kruze, DO, the Avera Health ministry provides its physician group, Avera Medical Group, a meaningful clinician well-being program. The LIGHT program offers proactive strategies for enhancing resiliency at work and at home. LIGHT also aims to create a compassionate culture within the Avera Medical Group, inspiring a vocational love for the art of medicine and fostering a life-giving practice environment.⁶

Considering a strategic approach to fostering workplace spirituality as a system also has had a significant impact on Avera Health's leadership formation. Through a variety of efforts, Avera supports leaders in deepening their own personal spirituality and equipping themselves to foster spirituality within their respective ministries and across the Avera system. One such effort is the Avera Leaders in Ministry program. This annual nine-month program, beginning its 12th year in 2016, is designed to integrate theological educa-

tion and personal spiritual formation, build community relationships among leaders and develop ways to encourage spiritual formation in local ministries. Upon successful completion of the formation program, each leader is commissioned and formally entrusted with the mission of the Avera ministry. Each leader vows to carry forward the values of compassion, stewardship and hospitality, to be committed to spiritual growth, to accept the call to share one's gifts for the good of the ministry and to keep charity always in dialogue with justice in shaping the future of the Avera Health ministry.⁷

The work of advancing the common good is the cornerstone of Catholic health ministry. Intentional workplace spirituality practices for the good of the ministry's mission advances the common good, awakens perception of the sacred around us and leads us to wholeness in practice and purpose.

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NOTES

1. Avera Belief Statement, "Called to Serve" (internal publication).
2. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, (April 11, 1963): 55, 57. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.
3. "Called to Serve."
4. Sigal G. Barsade and Olivia A. O'Neill, "What's Love Got to Do with It? A Longitudinal Study of the Culture of Companionate Love and Employee and Client Outcomes in the Long-Term Care Setting," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 2014): 551-98. <http://asq.sagepub.com/content/59/4/551>.
5. Heidi Pirkola, Piia Rantakokko and Marjo Suhonen, "Workplace Spirituality in Health Care: An Integrated Review of the Literature," *Journal of Nursing Management* (May 24, 2016). <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jonm.12398/full>.
6. Avera Medical Group, "Quality Report 2014-2015: Avera LIGHT Program." www.avera.org/about/quality-initiatives-reporting/quality-report/medical-group/#Avera-LIGHT-Program.
7. Avera Health, "Leaders in Ministry" (internal publication).

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